**What Is Alzheimer's?**

Alzheimer's is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms usually develop slowly and get worse over time, becoming severe enough to interfere with daily tasks.

Alzheimer's and dementia basics

•Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, a general term for memory loss and other intellectual abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60 to 80 percent of dementia cases.

There is a lot to know about living with Alzheimer's disease. Stay up-to-date on the latest advances in Alzheimer's, plus get tips on managing daily life with the disease.

•Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging, although the greatest known risk factor is increasing age, and the majority of people with Alzheimer's are 65 and older. But Alzheimer's is not just a disease of old age. Up to 5 percent of people with the disease have early onset Alzheimer's (also known as younger-onset), which often appears when someone is in their 40s or 50s.

•Alzheimer's worsens over time. Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, where dementia symptoms gradually worsen over a number of years. In its early stages, memory loss is mild, but with late-stage Alzheimer's, individuals lose the ability to carry on a conversation and respond to their environment. Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. Those with Alzheimer's live an average of eight years after their symptoms become noticeable to others, but survival can range from four to 20 years, depending on age and other health conditions.

•Alzheimer's has no current cure, but treatments for symptoms are available and research continues. Although current Alzheimer's treatments cannot stop Alzheimer's from progressing, they can temporarily slow the worsening of dementia symptoms and improve quality of life for those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Today, there is a worldwide effort under way to find better ways to treat the disease, delay its onset, and prevent it from developing.

Symptoms of Alzheimer's

The most common early symptom of Alzheimer's is difficulty remembering newly learned information.

Just like the rest of our bodies, our brains change as we age . Most of us eventually notice some slowed thinking and occasional problems with remembering certain things. However, serious memory loss, confusion and other major changes in the way our minds work may be a sign that brain cells are failing.

The most common early symptom of Alzheimer's is difficulty remembering newly learned information because Alzheimer's changes typically begin in the part of the brain that affects learning. As Alzheimer's advances through the brain it leads to increasingly severe symptoms, including disorientation, mood and behavior changes; deepening confusion about events, time and place; unfounded suspicions about family, friends and professional caregivers; more serious memory loss and behavior changes; and difficulty speaking, swallowing and walking.

People with memory loss or other possible signs of Alzheimer’s may find it hard to recognize they have a problem. Signs of dementia may be more obvious to family members or friends. Anyone experiencing dementia-like symptoms should see a doctor as soon as possible. If you need assistance finding a doctor with experience evaluating memory problems, your local Alzheimer's Association chapter can help. Early diagnosis and intervention methods are improving dramatically, and treatment options and sources of support can improve quality of life.

**Stages of Alzheimer's disease**

Effects of ageing on memory but not AD

* [Forgetting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgetting) things occasionally
* Misplacing items sometimes
* Minor [short-term memory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short-term_memory) loss
* Not remembering exact details

Early stage Alzheimer's

* Not remembering episodes of forgetfulness
* Forgets names of family or friends
* Changes may only be noticed by close friends or relatives
* Some confusion in situations outside the familiar

Middle stage Alzheimer's

* Greater difficulty remembering recently learned information
* Deepening confusion in many circumstances
* Problems with sleep
* Trouble knowing where they are

Late stage Alzheimer's

* Poor ability to think
* Problems speaking
* Repeats same conversations
* More abusive, anxious, or paranoid